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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 06 HAVANA 000103

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DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

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TAGS PGOV, PINR, PREL, ECON, AMED, SOCI, AMGT, CU

SUBJECT: CUBAN HEALTHCARE: "AQUI NADA ES FACIL"

(HERE NOTHING IS EASY)

REF: HAVANA 0076

Classified By: COM: Michael E. Parmly: For reasons 1.4 b/d

1. (C) SUMMARY: This cable is a follow up to Reftel and provides anecdotal accounts from Cubans about their healthcare, based on USINT FSHP's

2. (C) The following anecdotes were obtained from Cubans of various walks of life: domestic employees, neighbors in the Havana suburbs, USINT

-- A Cuban woman in her thirties confides, "It's all about who you know. I'm okay because I am healthy and I have 'friends' in the medical field

-- A 40-year old pregnant Cuban woman had a miscarriage. At the OB-Gyn hospital they used a primitive manual vacuum to aspirate the contents of

-- A 6-year old Cuban boy with osteosarcoma (bone cancer) is admitted to the oncology hospital. Only his parents are permitted to visit, and t

-- Many young cancer patients reportedly have become infected with Hepatitis C after their surgeries. Contracting Hepatitis C after surgery inc

-- During chemotherapy and radiation treatments, patients receive little in the way of symptom or side-effects care (i.e., severe nausea, vomit

-- HIV positive patients have had the letters 'SIDA' (AIDS)

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stamped on their national ID cards. Needless to say, in a country where the national ID card must be shown for everything from getting monthly

-- Some newly diagnosed HIV/AIDS patients are held in what has come to be known as "Prision de Pacientes con SIDA de San Jose" (Prison for AIDE

-- AIDS patients are not given prophylaxis medication for the prevention of PCP (Pneumocystis carinii pneumonia), and for lack of newer medicine

-- While the GOC claims there is a network of organizations that provide social support for HIV/AIDS patients, many of our sources say they hav

-- A physician XXXXXXXXXXXX told the FSHP that he works 14 hours every other day, then has to hitchhike home because he cannot afford to own a

-- XXXXXXXXXXXX stated that Cuban authorities have banned Michael Moore's documentary, "Sicko," as being subversive. Although the film's intent

-- Even the Cuban ruling elite sometimes goes outside of Cuba for the best medical care. Fidel Castro, in July, 2006 brought in a Spanish doctc

-- According to a local pediatrician, the approximate breakdown of Cuban physicians' salaries are: 1st & 2nd year residents earn 325 pesos mon

-- There is reportedly such a shortage of nurses that within the last few years, a high-school graduate is now offered an

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accelerated training course of just ten-months duration entitled, "Enfermeras Emergentes" (Emergency Nurses). These "quasi" nurses are not trai

-- Few medical professionals are allowed access to the internet and are rarely allowed to travel to participate in international conferences or

-- As described in reftel, the best medical institutions in Cuba are reserved for foreigners with hard currency, members of the ruling elite an

4. (C) Below are first-hand observations from USINT's Foreign Service Health Practitioner's (FSHP) impromptu and unauthorized (by the GOC) vis

A. Hermanos Ameijeiras Hospital

-- Address: San Lazaro #701 Esquina A Belascoain, Centro Habana, Havana

-- Date of visit: October, 2007

-- Built in 1982, this newly renovated 600 bed, 24 story hospital is depicted in Michael Moore's film "Sicko," where some 60 surgeries are perf

-- Upon entering the building the FSHP was struck by the grand and impressive lobby with a four-story ceiling, polished terrazzo floors and an

-- She was told the majority of patients came from Venezuela and each received weekly one bar of Palmolive bath soap, Palmolive shampoo, and a

-- Due to the high volume of foreigners receiving treatments and surgeries, most Cubans do not have access - the only chance might be a through

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that the best hospital in Havana is "off-limits" to them.

B. Ramon Gonzalez Coro Hospital

-- Address: Calle 21 #856 between 4th & 6th Avenues, Vedado Plaza, Havana

-- Date of visit: July, 2006

-- What is today the Obstetrics & Gynecology (OB-Gyn) hospital for Havana, used to be a private clinic prior to the revolution. The hospital ha

-- The FSHP visited this hospital with a pregnant USINT American patient. Normally USINT staff is required to go to Cira Garcia Clinic, but bec

-- This hospital, located in the densely populated residential area of Vedado, had a dilapidated and crumbling exterior. The FSHP was stopped a

-- After waiting 15 minutes a nurse in a white uniform appeared and told the FSHP and her patient to wait. She wasn't friendly. There was no we

-- Although the doctor appeared to be clinically competent, she was abrupt and rough with the patient. FSHP believes this to be typical of the

-- would

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be by the FSHP in their own home with telephone consults to an obstetrician in the U.S.

-- XXXXXXXXXXXX told the FSHP that XXXXXXXXXXXX foreign medical students are increasingly covering for the gross shortages of physicians in Cul

C. Calixto Garcia Hospital

-- Address: Avenida De Universidad Y 27 De Noviembre, Vedado, Havana

-- Date of visit: November, 2007

-- Built in the late 1800's, this dilapidated 400-bed hospital was the first teaching hospital in Cuba and is only for Cubans. FSHP believes th
-- During the hospital visit, FSHP was struck by the shabbiness of the facility -- no renovations were apparent -- and the lack of everything (
-- In an open-curtained exam room inside the emergency room, FSHP saw a middle-aged man lying on a gurney in his own soiled clothes with a larg
-- The hospital is spread out over several city blocks consisting of many two-story buildings with various specialties: Internal Medicine, Card
-- The laboratory equipment is very rudimentary - a simple CBC (complete blood count) blood test is calculated manually by a laboratory technic
-- As the FSHP exited a building, XXXXXXXXXXXX drove up in a badly dented 1981 Moskvovich that belched exhaust fumes. The private car, which is

14D. Salvador Allende Hospital

-- Address: Calzada Del Cerro # 1551, Cerro, Havana

-- Date of visit: November, 2007

-- This 400-bed hospital is located in Cerro - a poorer and more densely populated section than the others visited in Havana. It is an old, run
-- The FSHP was dropped off a few blocks away so the guards wouldn't see the diplomatic plates. When she walked in, the guards smelled of alcoh
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be seen. It appeared to be very orderly, clean, and organized.

-- The rest of the buildings were in shambles . The FSHP did not see any "real" medicine or nursing practiced during her almost one-hour walk t

15. (C) Comment: After living in Cuba for two and a half years, treating numerous Cuban employees at USINT, and interacting with many other Cub
PARMLY